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## Making a Difference

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April 27, 2010 in [Tales from Taiwan](#) by [prkatz](#) | [1 comment](#)

By Paul R. Katz

Each of us can make a difference. It may not be easy, but it can be done; all you need is love, patience, and dedication.

One person who has made a difference is Hsiao Hsien-Ming 蕭賢明, who works for the [Council for Cultural Affairs](#) of the Executive Yuan (行政院文化建設委員會). Like so many of us, he watched in horror as the news came in about the village of Siaolin 小林 being wiped off the face of the earth. Moreover, as a father of three small children (Chemg is 12, Zoe is 9, and Zhi is 6), he felt the deepest sorrow for the numerous young lives that had been lost. Much has been done to help Siaolin stand up, and previous posts on this blog have described how the government and various NGO's have contributed to various reconstruction projects (see earlier reports [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Compassionate and caring individuals have done their share as well; Hsiao is one example.

It began shortly before Children's Day (兒童節; celebrated on April 4 in Taiwan), when Hsiao's thoughts turned to an image of the Siaolin Elementary School principal standing in prayer on behalf of those school children who had perished. Profoundly moved, Hsiao decided to visit Siaolin and help its youngest survivors give voice to their thoughts in words, images, and especially music.

Hsiao arrived in Siaolin on the morning of April 4, accompanied by a colleague from the Council for Cultural Affairs, two students from [Tainan National University of the Arts](#), village leaders, school teachers, parents, and representatives of the [Association for the Reconstruction of Siaolin's Plains Aborigine Culture](#) (小林平埔原住民族文化重建協會), including Professor Chien Wen-min 簡文敏 and Hung Shu-fen 洪淑芬. They all headed to the neighboring village of Wulipu 五里埔, where many of Siaolin's surviving families now reside. There they met some of Siaolin's school children and their parents, and explained to them how they hoped to make this a special day for the kids who were there, as well as those who no longer had a chance to take part.

Once everything was all set, Hsiao took out his clarinet and started to play for the kids, with some singing along and others accompanying on their own musical instruments. Together, they played a number of Taiwanese and Western classics, including "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" (小星星), "Jasmine" (茉莉花), "Spring Breeze" (望春風), and "The Moon Represents My Heart" (月亮代表我的心). The children also spent time making paper hearts and drawing pretty pictures on them as gifts for their deceased classmates. Sounds of joy filled the room.



Yet there was also sorrow, as could be seen in some of the messages the children wrote to their departed friends:

"How could you leave us without saying goodbye?"

"I hope you can go to school in Heaven, and that you are doing well up there."

"I miss you, I miss you so much. Do you miss me? I hope you are happy in Heaven, and that we will see each other again. Do you remember your nickname?"

"Here's hoping they build us a new school soon. Wishing you joy up in Heaven."

When the children had finished making their gifts, Hsiao and the other adults loaded the paper hearts as well as flowers they had prepared into a truck, and drove to the disaster site. There they laid the flowers on the ground in the shape of a giant heart, and placed the little hearts inside.



Hsiao then played the clarinet again, performing the same songs on behalf of the children who had perished, all the while thinking that if his own children had been the victims he would have wished for someone to do something similar on their behalf. For it is parents' love for their children that can help them bear such an immeasurable loss, and continue down the path of life.



When the last notes had faded away, Hsiao and his companions prepared to leave, placing small stones on the paper hearts so that they would not easily blow away. As they drove off, Hsiao spotted a young couple and their small child walking past the monument to love on their way to some



unknown destination. They stopped, gazed at the flowers and hearts, and then moved on, perhaps now with a more pleasant memory of a site that holds so much sorrow. May they never walk alone.



Yes, one person can make a difference. And now we know what it takes . . .

*Note: All photographs taken by Hung Shu-fen 洪淑芬.*

**Tags:** [Siaolin](#)